

Lead us not into Temptation

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[0 : 00] Have you heard about the Temptation Challenge? It's been one of the social media trends in recent months. Hashtag Temptation Challenge. And it's where children are tempted with some kind of treat by their parents.

So the parents will place the sweets or the chocolate in front of their children and then they'll tell them to wait, not to eat anything until they come back into the room and are filmed to capture the reaction of the child to see whether they can resist or whether they give in to the temptation and scoff the treat.

Celebrities have been getting in on the act as well. So Joe Wicks and Kylie Jenner have been tempting their children and others have also tried the Temptation Challenge on their dogs.

And it's meant to be good fun for social media. But in reality, when it comes to temptation, it is no laughing matter. Temptation and falling into temptation is dangerous.

And that's why Jesus tells us to pray for protection in the Lord's Prayer. At the very end, he tells us to pray and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

[1 : 11] Because when we're faced with temptation, we know how easy it is to give in. And that's why Jesus tells us to ask our Father in Heaven for help. We need protection so we don't fall into sin.

So we're praying, lead us not into temptation for protection on the inside because of our sinful human nature. And then we're praying, deliver us from the evil one for protection on the outside, protection from the world and from the devil.

It's because of the enslaving power of the world, the flesh and the devil that Jesus tells us to pray for protection. And so no matter who we are, whether we call ourselves a Christian or not, we need God's help.

And so the Lord's Prayer tells us that we can have a heavenly Father who not only wants to protect his children, but who is more than able to protect his children. And so we're going to think about what it means to pray and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

And we'll think about it under three headings. First, know your weakness. Second, know your enemy. And third, know your protector. Know your weakness, know your enemy and know your protector.

[2 : 29] First of all, know your weakness. We'll only take this final part of the Lord's Prayer seriously if we know how weak we are. Because if we think we're strong enough to resist temptation and protect ourselves from sin and evil, then we won't sense the urgency of this prayer.

Yet the reality is that we're always going to be tempted to sin. And Christians are not immune from temptation. That's why it's naive to think that we've got the strength to resist.

So why does Jesus tell us to pray specifically, lead us not into temptation? After all, shouldn't we expect that God would never lead us into temptation anyway?

Well, the words translated as temptation here can also mean test or trial. Now, any test can be a good thing or a bad thing. It just depends on how we respond.

So take your driving test as an example. If you're a good driver, a confident driver, then the test is an opportunity to prove yourself and get your license.

[3 : 33] But if you're a bad driver, if you lack confidence, then the test is a nightmare. You just embarrass yourself and you fail. And so when we pray, lead us not into temptation, we're asking that God would protect us from failure by doing what's wrong and that he would help us to do what is right and avoid sin.

The best way to make sense of this is to look at Jesus' own experience. Earlier in Matthew chapter 4, we read about Jesus being tempted. Listen to how it's recorded in Matthew chapter 4, verse 1.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Did you hear that? It was the devil who tempted Jesus, but it was the Spirit of God who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted.

And so to understand what Jesus is teaching in the Lord's Prayer, we need to put these two things together. On the one hand, temptation comes from the devil. But on the other hand, God allows us to be tempted so we do what's right.

And we will be tempted just as Jesus was. And Jesus passed the test. He faced temptation, but he did not sin. And so we should be praying something like, please God, when I'm faced with temptation, help me not to fail.

[5 : 00] Don't let me, God, succumb to temptation so that I fall into sin. You see, temptation will always be around us. And we don't want to be lured into sin.

And so, aware of our weakness and potential to sin, we must pray as Jesus tells us to. Martin Luther, the German reformer, said in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer, that temptation can be avoided by no one.

He said, you cannot prevent the birds from flying in the air over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair. Now, Luther was saying that we can't stop temptation, but by prayer and the protection of God, we don't need to let temptation lead us into sin.

And so we should never think that we are immune to temptation, or that we've got the strength to stop before it's too late, or that it can never happen to me. I would never fall into that particular sin. And that's why Jesus teaches us to keep praying that we would not be led into temptation. The desire to sin is in our hearts, and if given the opportunity, it could easily lead us astray.

[6 : 18] Take adultery as an example. Now, those who commit adultery don't usually set out on a mission to wreck their marriage. It tends to happen as they get lured deeper and deeper into temptation.

And so what seems innocent to begin with can lead to getting into certain situations, or doing certain things, and the temptation just becomes too hard to resist.

And so we can't pray, lead us not into temptation, and yet sign up for a dating app like Tinder. We can't pray, lead us not into temptation, yet let ourselves get too close to that colleague at work.

We can't pray, lead us not into temptation, and yet still go to that alcohol-fueled social event. Or if we're a student, you can't pray, lead us not into temptation, yet invite your boyfriend or girlfriend back to your flat late at night.

Can you see? We can get ourselves into situations where we are too weak, but temptation is too strong. And if we continue to sail dangerously close to the rocks, thinking that we've got everything under control, it may only be a matter of time before we smash into them.

[7 : 33] And that's why Jesus teaches us to pray for God's protection. Now the story is told of a man who kept praying about his temptation, but he never did anything about it.

So week after week in the church prayer meeting, he would pray, God, clean the cobwebs out of my life, and stop the web of sin. Every week it was the same prayer, God, clean the cobwebs out of my life, and stop the web of sin.

But eventually his pastor had had enough. And so as the man started to pray, God, clean the cobwebs, the pastor shouted, stop! God, no, don't clean the cobwebs, kill the spider.

Forget the stupid cobwebs, and kill the spider. You see, why pray and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, if we are going to deliberately continue to flirt with temptation, and risk falling into sin.

We're too weak to resist temptation in our own strength. That's why we need to be praying something like, Father, put a thick concrete wall around me, with razor wire on top, to stop me being led into temptation, that would cause me to sin.

[8 : 46] So this is more than a prayer not to be tempted. It's a prayer that asks God to protect us from falling into sin when we are tempted.

And so that's our first point, know your weakness. Second point is know your enemy. Not only are we weak, but we also have a powerful enemy. That's why we pray, deliver us from the evil one. Now the evil one is the devil. Some manuscripts say, deliver us from evil. But the form of the Greek word means that it could be translated either way. And it doesn't actually matter, because whether we're praying, deliver us from evil, or the evil one, it amounts to the same thing.

Because behind everything evil, stands the devil himself. And that's why we need to know our enemy, and be aware of his schemes, so that we're not caught off guard. But it's easy to underestimate how strong and devious he is. Perhaps by imagining him as a bit of a joke, the man with red horns and the pointy tail and the pitchfork.

[9 : 55] Somebody we don't need to take seriously. But we can also overestimate him, by thinking he's more powerful than he actually is. As if he's an equal match for God, like the dark side in Star Wars.

No, he is a powerful enemy, but God is an even stronger protector. And yet, he is still the evil one who wants us to do evil.

And that's why Jesus tells us to pray, deliver us. Because the evil one will use everything at his disposal to wage war against God and his people.

And being a Christian means we're caught up in all of this. And so we have the Lord's prayer as our primary weapon in the spiritual warfare. Every time we pray it, we're reminded of the evil one and our need for protection.

Because this is that daily battle that we're in for the rest of our lives. And so we need to know our weakness, because that's where our enemy, the evil one, will focus his attacks.

[10 : 57] And they may be blatant, but normally they're very subtle. But that's warfare, isn't it? Discover the opposition's weakness and exploit it. Listen to this later in the Bible, in 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 8.

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. So every day we must fight against the world, the flesh and the devil. And each phase of life will present unique temptations for us. Temptation doesn't stop when you get through your teenage years, or when you're through your student life, or when you get married. Even when we retire, the temptation to sin doesn't retire. Getting older doesn't mean loss of temptation, or less temptation, just different temptation.

That's why Jesus includes this in his model prayer, because it's something we need to be praying every day of our whole life. So as we apply this, are there any temptations that we need to be more alert to?

[12 : 08] Are there areas or aspects of our lives where we make it easy for the devil, the evil one, to get a foothold? Because we need to be alert to his tactics.

Remember, he wants to draw us deeper and deeper into sin. And he'll even try to convince us that what we're doing won't lead to sin, or even what we're doing isn't sin.

And so if it's not going to cause anyone any harm, he'll make us think it's fine. But if we don't know our enemy, if we don't recognise his work, or pray to be delivered, then we're in danger of harming others, of harming ourselves, as well as our relationship with God.

And so we're playing right into his hands. He is dangerous. And he will use whatever he can, and whoever he can, to fight against God and his people.

That's why we're told in Ephesians chapter 6 to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power, and to put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

[13 : 13] So we need to pray to be delivered from the evil one, and the evil he wants us to do. So know your weakness, first of all.

Secondly, know your enemy. And thirdly, know your protector. Jesus wants us to pray for God's protection. We are weak.

Our enemy is strong. But we have a Father in heaven who protects us. He not only wants to help us, but he is able to help us.

And so when it comes to temptation, sin is not the inevitable outcome. Deliverance is available. But how can we be sure? Well, it's because the devil, the evil one, has limited power.

He has already been defeated. The powers of Satan, sin and death were defeated by the death and resurrection of Jesus. And so Hebrews chapter 2, verse 14, speaks of Jesus and says, He too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil.

[14 : 24] And 1 John chapter 3, verse 8 says, The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. And so the evil one is a defeated foe.

Jesus dealt him a death blow at the cross. And so when we pray, deliver us from the evil one, we're asking our heavenly Father to protect us from our already defeated and doomed enemy, the devil.

But some might be asking, if he is already defeated, why is he still able to attack? Well, I think it's something like a boxing match or a mixed martial arts fight.

That helps us understand. Because very often in the fight, it's obvious who the winner is, even before the fight is over. Usually because one fighter smashes their opponent with such a decisive blow that they're going to win.

They know it, their opponent knows it, the judges know it, and the crowd know it. But it doesn't mean that the losing fighter just gives up. No, they fight on with limited power, trying everything they can do to hurt their opponent.

[15 : 31] And so the devil, he knows he's defeated, but he will never give up the fight. He will do all he can to fight against God and God's people, seeking to do as much damage with sin and evil as possible.

And that's why Jesus tells us to keep praying and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. That's why temptation doesn't always need to lead to sin and defeat.

Paul reminds us of this in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 13. He says, So God won't allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear.

And when we are tempted, he'll also give an escape route. And so this should encourage us, but it should also warn us because we can't use temptation as an excuse for our sin.

By saying something like, well, I couldn't help it. The temptation was just too powerful for me to resist. And trying to shift the responsibility for our sin away from ourselves.

[16 : 53] Because if we do sin, it is always our fault. So God makes sure we're not overtaken by temptation that we can't resist. But that doesn't mean we won't ever be tested.

After all, parents don't wrap their children up in cotton wool. It wouldn't be healthy if they were never tested in life. That's how children grow towards maturity is through testing.

And yet all decent parents will never fail to protect their children and deliver them from danger. And so how much more our Father in heaven?

The Lord's Prayer concludes by telling us that God is a protective and loving Father who always looks after his children.

He will never neglect or abandon us. He has given us Jesus, the one who endured every temptation the evil one threw at him. So he can help us with whatever temptation we face.

[17 : 55] We read this in Hebrews. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. And then again in Hebrews, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses.

But we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin. Jesus was tempted in every way.

And so when it comes to temptation, Jesus has literally been there. But when it comes to sin, he has never done that. Yet Jesus willingly died for all our sins so that we can be forgiven when we trust in him.

So if Jesus resisted the devil's temptation in the wilderness and he resisted the temptation to turn away from the cross in the garden of Gethsemane, if Jesus didn't fail us then but was willing to suffer and die to deliver us from the punishment we deserve for our sin, then we can be sure that he won't fail us now, no matter what temptation we face.

There is no other religion that speaks of a God who suffers to protect and deliver his people.

Dorothy Sayers, the renowned English writer, says this, for whatever reason God chose to make man as he is, limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death.

[19 : 28] He had the honesty and the courage to take his own medicine. God did this for us. Without this loving sacrifice, we have no protection from the sin that will destroy us eternally.

And so we must turn from our sin and trust in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only Lord who, when you receive him, will protect you completely.

And if you fail him, will always forgive you. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you for sending Jesus, who was willing to give his life so that our sins can be forgiven.

We're so grateful that you are a protecting and loving Father who always looks after your children.

So when we face temptation, please deliver us.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[20 : 36] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.